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Appropriations Committee

December 9, 2009

Jennifer Garrison

Thank you Honorables Toni Harp and John Geragosian for allowing me to address you today on the subject of Governor Rell's proposed budget cuts and how those cuts will affect me, my family, my friends, and my employer.

My name is Jennifer Garrison and I have lived in South Windsor for nearly two years now, having come from CA where I was born and raised. I am very fortunate to have a wonderful family, a great group of friends, and some pretty fabulous clinicians. I am the President of NAMI Manchester where we work to educate, support, and advocate for those living with a mental illness and their family and friends. I also work for the Chrysalis Center here in Hartford, where I am blessed to work with a great bunch of clients and co-workers.

The Governor's proposed budget cuts could be devastating for me and many of my loved-ones. With such a short amount of time to address the committee I don't even know where to begin... I will attempt to make much my concerns real to you by telling you about my adorable 13-year old nephew, and a client of mine from work.

My nephew Tommy is the apple of his Auntie's eye, and is a very "special" kid. He lives on the Autism Spectrum and has some additional chromosomal abnormalities. If it wasn't for the FABULOUS care he receives from his therapist and psychiatrist that are funded by Husky he would be a very different child. I worry that if mental health services for children get cut that Tommy will end up in a very bad place. I also worry that he is just a few years away from the need to transition to DMHAS for services. So many young adults "drop out" of the "adult" system due to frustration and the bureaucracy of the system, what will happen to these kids? What will happen to my Tommy?

I have a client "Jane" who used to be just like my Tommy. A young person with mental health challenges. Today she is a 44 year old woman who has spent the great majority of her adult life in prison. Jane did not have good mental health services as a young adult. She fell into self medicating, and into a life of "crime" to support her "habit."

Jane is now working VERY hard at turning her life around. Unfortunately due to her felony convictions she and her family are about to lose their housing. Housing

options are few and far between for people like Jane. People with felony convictions who also happen to be persons in recovery. Not only does Jane have to deal with the stigma of her situations, but now she has to worry about Governor Rell's budget cuts. If Jane cannot get her meds, and get safe housing she may end up right back in York ... not a place for a very nice woman like Jane.

Without proper treatment and intervention Tommy and Jane are not much more than societal throw aways.

One more thing... last but certainly not least is how the proposed budget cuts will affect me and my coworkers at the Chrysalis Center. As you are well aware it's been quite some time since private non-profits have received a cost of living increase. I am new to working in the non-profit world, so much this is very foreign to me. I was discussing this issue with a friend the other day. She is out of work and collecting unemployment, and I only take home \$100 a month more than she does. Pretty sad when people who are providing services to the neediest of Connecticut barely make what some make on unemployment.

Thank you so much for your time and attention. I hope something that I said here today strikes a cord with you that says we need to leave services for those in greatest need alone. I think I have the perfect solution... let's cut the menu choices down in the legislative lunchroom to see if we can save a few bucks.

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